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ABSTRACT

Aspire to Win through Academic Retention in Excellence (Project AWARE) was evaluated after its first year (1989-90) of offering limited-English-proficient Spanish-speaking students individual and group counseling, college and career guidance, family assistance, and youth leadership development. Services were also given to families and to students who were pregnant, parenting, or in temporary living arrangements. The program served 677 students attending George Washington, Morris, Newtown, and East District High Schools in New York City. ASPIRA, a community-based organization, was in charge of organizing, supervising, and implementing this program. Project AWARE met its objectives in compliance and parental involvement, and partially met its objective for attendance. However, the project did not meet its objective for increasing the grade passing rate. Specific recommendations were made for improving service delivery. Statistical data are presented in one table. (SLD)

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OREA Report

ASPIRE TO WIN THROUGH ACADEMIC
RETENTION IN EXCELLENCE
(PROJECT AWARE)

1989-90

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

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ASPIRE TO WIN THROUGH ACADEMIC RETENTION IN EXCELLENCE (PROJECT AWARE)

1989-90

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

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8/90

ASPIRE TO WIN THROUGH ACADEMIC RETENTION IN EXCELLENCE
(PROJECT AWARE)
1989-90

SUMMARY

- Project AWARE was fully implemented. The project offered Spanish-speaking students of limited English proficiency (LEP) individual and group counseling, college and career guidance, family assistance, and youth leadership development.

- Project AWARE met its objectives in compliance and parental involvement and partially met its objective for attendance. The project did not meet its objective for grade passing.

Aspire to Win Through Academic Retention in Excellence (Project AWARE) was in its first year of support by the New York City Board of Education Chancellor's discretionary funds. The program served 677 students at George Washington, Morris, Newtown, and Eastern District High Schools. ASPIRA, a community-based organization, was in charge of organizing, supervising, and implementing this program. Project AWARE provided individual and group counseling, family assistance, and youth leadership development. The project also provided services to students' families and students who were pregnant, parenting, or in temporary living arrangements.

The conclusions, based on the findings of this evaluation, lead to the following recommendations:

- Project guidance personnel would benefit from consulting regularly with school counselors.

- The project should seek chaperones for field trips by giving the faculty advance notice of project activities.

- The project should offer program services to ninth-graders who study at the Newtown High School annex.

- The project office at Newtown High School should be provided with a telephone.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report has been prepared by the Bilingual, Multicultural, and Early Childhood valuation Unit of the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment. Thanks are due to Carlos Bordé for collecting the data.

Additional copies of this report are available from:

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I. INTRODUCTION

This report documents the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment's (OREA's) evaluation of Aspire to Win Through Academic Retention in Excellence (Project AWARE), a program supported by the Chancellor's discretionary fund. Project AWARE aimed to reduce truancy and dropout rates at four high schools with chronic rates at or above the district median. These were George Washington High School, Manhattan; Newtown High School, Queens; Eastern District High School, Brooklyn; and Morris High School, Bronx. In its first year, the project provided students with services in career and college orientation, counseling and guidance, leadership development, and family outreach.

PARTICIPATING STUDENTS

The project served 677 Spanish-speaking students of limited English proficiency (LEP) who were over-age for their grade and were at risk of dropping out of high school. Students came from low-income families; many worked after school.

Newtown High School

The program served students in grades 10-12. Ninth-grade students at Newtown High School did not receive services because they were housed in an annex about a mile from the main building.

Eastern District High School

Eastern District High School had been suffering from high tension between Puerto Rican, Dominican, and black students. Student riots there had resulted in the death of a security guard.

Morris High School

Population was highly transient and stressed by the deteriorated condition of the building (the oldest high school building in the city).

George Washington High School

Students' problems were in the areas of immigration, sexual activity, drug trafficking, and drug abuse. Rather than a bilingual guidance counselor, the school utilized the services of bilingual family advisors.

STAFF

Personnel from ASPIRA, a community-based organization, implemented and supervised Project AWARE. The project was staffed by a project director, two program coordinators, four educational support specialists, four assistants acting as counselors, eight family assistants, an executive assistant, and an administrative secretary. All were fluent in English and Spanish. Each program coordinator supervised the program at two schools; the project director supervised staff at all sites.

II. IMPLEMENTATION

STUDENT SERVICES

The project provided services to the target group in career and college orientation; counseling and guidance; leadership development; and parent empowerment/family outreach. The program exposed students to career opportunities and encouraged students to pursue further education upon graduation

from high school. Program staff organized trips to local and out-of-town colleges, helped students complete financial aid applications, and provided workshops on how to finance a college degree. The project brought in guest speakers from the community.

Project AWARE offered field trips to the Bronx Supreme Court, a hospital, a museums, and to a private financial service. Partially because the project neglected to give faculty advance notice of these trips, it had difficulty finding faculty members willing to act as chaperones.

Project AWARE organized at least one college or career workshop each month, at which military personnel and other professionals spoke. The program offered workshops on such topics as drug abuse, birth control, AIDS, suicide, and child abuse.

PARENT SERVICES

The program provided a variety of services for parents. Monthly workshops covered such topics as immigration, housing, English classes for parents, obtaining medical assistance, and involvement in children's education. All were poorly attended--one workshop was attended by only one parent, and no more than 15 parents attended any of the others. However, the program had a highly successful family outreach component, which offered family assistance and home visits. Family assistants were able to gather valuable information to give the schools about a student's home environment. They also acted as translators when needed by

parents and school personnel. Students who would have had to take time off from class to act as translators for their parents in a variety of situations were relieved of this burden and thus able to keep school attendance more stable. Project AWARE at Newtown High School was impeded in family outreach activities by lack of a telephone. Staff wanting to contact parents had to use a pay phone or go to the home.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The leadership development component of the program encouraged program students to participate in student-run clubs. Club members held meetings twice a month, organized workshops, and involved themselves with community issues. For example, Morris High School students wrote letters and petitioned the Chancellor of the New York City Public Schools and other public officials to do something about the badly deteriorated physical condition of their school. Also at Morris High School, the death of two classmates who had been run over by a drunken driver caused students to implement a Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD) chapter at their school. In the month of March, students from all ASPIRA-sponsored leadership development clubs in the country met in Albany.

III. OUTCOMES

COMPLIANCE

- There will be 100 percent compliance in students served, with 50 percent of those students being recruited by the end of the first semester.

By January 1990, Project AWARE had served 486 students. By June 1990, the project had served 686 students. Project AWARE met its objective for compliance.

ATTENDANCE

- Attendance will increase by five percent.

Attendance rates varied from school to school. At Morris and Newtown High Schools attendance rates increased at least the expected five percent. (See Table 1.) At George Washington High School attendance rate showed a decrease, and at Eastern District High School there was no change.

Project staff noted that riots at Eastern District High School had led to a schoolwide decrease in attendance that was reflected in the attendance rate of project students.

Project AWARE met its objective for attendance at two of its four sites.

GRADE PASSING

- Grade passing will increase by 50 percent.

In 1989-1990, the passing rate increased 3.0 percent. Project AWARE did not meet its grade passing objective.

TABLE 1

Attendance Rates at Participating High Schools

High School	Semester		
	Fall	Spring	Change
Morris	77.2	83.6	Increase
Newtown	84.1	89.2	Increase
George Washington	89.0	87.7	Decrease
Eastern District	77.9	77.9	No Change

- The expected attendance increase occurred at two schools.

PARENT EMPOWERMENT AND FAMILY OUTREACH

- The project will increase parental involvement in school and program activities to the point of forming AWARE/ASPIRA Parent Associations.

The family assistance and home visit component enabled the creation of closer ties between project and families and an ensuing increase in parental involvement in all schools.

Monthly family outreach workshops were open to parents of program and non-program students. Attendance was low at first but improved over the course of the year.

AWARE/ASPIRA Parent Associations were in the process of forming and were projected to be fully functioning in all schools during the 1990-1991 school year.

The project met its objective for parent involvement.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Project AWARE provided support services to more than 600 Spanish-speaking LEP students at four high schools known for their high truancy and dropout rates. While it met its objectives for parental involvement and compliance in students served, the project failed to meet its attendance objective at two of its four schools and failed to meet its objective for grade passing.

Project AWARE's strengths lay its well-structured and supervised program and its family outreach component.

The conclusions, based on the findings of this evaluation, lead to the following recommendations:

- Project guidance personnel would benefit from consulting regularly with school counselors.
- The project should seek chaperones for field trips by giving the faculty advance notice of project activities.
- The project should offer program services to ninth-graders who study at the Newtown High School annex.
- The project office at Newtown High School should be provided with a telephone.